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SUBJECT: Hohmann Anti-Semitism Affair Leaves Open Wounds

[11](#). (SBU) SUMMARY. The CDU's tepid and belated response to anti-Semitic remarks by Bundestag member (MdB) Martin Hohmann has highlighted enduring nationalist sentiments and resentment against Germany's Holocaust burden, and weakened leading CDU figure Roland Koch. END SUMMARY.

[12](#). (U) On German Unity Day (Oct. 3), CDU Bundestag member Martin Hohmann delivered a speech to two hundred constituents in Neuhoef (rural Hesse, near Fulda). In a speech with many nationalist themes, Hohmann remarked:

BEGIN UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION: "Germans have paid for the Holocaust with billions of Euros (...) but I raise the provocative question: Is there a dark side to the Jewish people in more recent history, or is the role as victim, which we exclusively attribute to Jews, justified?" Referring to the participation of Jews in the Russian revolution, Hohmann said "... with some justification, consider the millions of deaths in the (Bolshevik) revolution and raise the question of Jewish complicity ... Calling the Jewish people perpetrators (Taetervolk) follows the same logic as calling Germans committers of crimes."

END TRANSLATED EXCERPT.

[13](#). (SBU) Hohmann's speech did not cause public controversy until several weeks later, since no one in the audience registered offense. Hohmann later apologized for the remarks, but refused to renounce the speech itself. NOTE: According to consulate sources, the Office for Protection of the Constitution (which monitors extremist groups) discovered the speech after Horst Mahler, a leading figure in the far-right NPD (National Democratic Party), circulated Hohmann's text as a model of far-right thinking. END NOTE.

[14](#). (SBU) The CDU's reaction to the speech was mixed and conflicted. While national CDU leadership quickly condemned Hohmann's remarks, Hesse Minister-President / CDU chief Roland Koch declared the case closed after the CDU presidium resolved to replace Hohmann as Bundestag domestic affairs committee spokesman (but leave him in the CDU caucus). When Hohmann persistently refused to renounce the speech, Merkel announced that the CDU caucus would exclude Hohmann, and a visibly defeated Koch indicated that the Hesse CDU would strip Hohmann's party membership.

[15](#). (SBU) On November 14, the CDU Bundestag caucus voted behind closed doors to exclude Hohmann from the caucus, apparently the first such vote in the party's history. Although CDU leadership secured the necessary two-thirds majority, media seized on the fact that a fifth of CDU deputies refused to censure Hohmann (195 MPs voted for expulsion, 28 against, 16 abstentions) as a further sign that CDU hardliners are unwilling to part ways with anti-Semitic notions.

Grass Roots Support for Hohmann?

[16](#). (SBU) Defense Minister Peter Struck (SPD) fired BG Reinhard Guenzel, commander of the KSK (Kommando Spezialkraefte/Special Forces), for sending a letter to Hohmann -- on Bundeswehr letterhead -- praising Hohmann's courage and supporting the remarks. On Nov. 4, DefMin Struck censured Guenzel for damaging the reputation of Germany and of the military but called the letter the isolated opinion of "a confused general who supports an even more confused CDU Bundestag deputy." NOTE: Guenzel later threatened to sue Struck for defamation. Guenzel drew headlines and a reprimand in 2001 for warning that Germans would face a bloodbath in Afghanistan, but was popular within the KSK. Observers noted the contrast between Struck's quick reaction and CDU's waffling. END NOTE.

[17](#). (SBU) A number of CDU local reps and individual members have also voiced support for Hohmann. Not surprisingly, Hohmann has supporters from his home region of rural Hesse. CDU MdB Vera Lengsfeld (Thuringen) criticized the alleged media campaign against Hohmann. A handful of CDU city assembly members in Hesse (including Frankfurt), Baden-Wuerttemberg, and elsewhere declared their support for Hohmann. Media reported that most phones calls to CDU

headquarters in Berlin were in support of Hohmann. Even as late as November 20, Hohmann spoke at a closed-door local CDU assembly in Fulda, where members recommended giving Hohmann a second chance.

Jewish Community Reaction

18. (SBU) Moritz Neumann, head of the Jewish community in Hesse, described the speech as the worst anti-Semitic statement from a German politician in a long time and dangerous in that it breaks the taboo of anti-Semitism and "relativizes" the Holocaust. "Hohmann said what many in the CDU actually feel." Neumann asked how someone "with a notorious history of making statements against minorities" could become responsible for Holocaust compensation issues in the CDU caucus. Many Jews are unhappy with the Hesse CDU's handling of the affair and particularly with Koch, who has otherwise shown support for Jewish community issues. Show of Weakness for Koch

19. (SBU) The Hohmann affair has damaged Koch politically and could continue to hurt the Hesse CDU, since the legal process of stripping Hohmann's party membership may take months. In a speech at the Reichspogromnacht (Kristalnacht) commemoration in Frankfurt on November 9, Koch had ruled out barring Hohmann from the CDU -- prompting audience members to boo his comments -- only to find himself overruled by Merkel the following day. In media accounts, Koch appeared outmaneuvered by hardliners and by the national CDU, and the affair could damage Koch's efforts to present himself as a moderate. Hesse CDU reps told Pol-Econ rep that Hesse conservatives are embarrassed and angry at Merkel for having "exploited" this opening against Koch.

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